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Pop Star of the Month

Exclusive Interview With Christine McVie

by Steve Wosahla

Christine McVie was the first member of Fleetwood Mac to record a solo album but it's not something she cares to remember. Back in 1969, before she married Fleetwood Mac's bassist John McVie, she was Christine Perfect, the keyboard person in Chicken Shack and the soon to be Best Female Vocalist in the annual Melody Maker magazine poll.

The record was never released in America until Christine's songs such as "Over My Head" and "Say You Love Me" made Fleetwood Mac superstars. Sire Records re-released it as *The Legendary Christine Perfect Album* by Christine McVie. It upset her because they capitalized on the name McVie and took material from an era in which she admitted to having no particular style or strong voice. "I didn't have one finger in the pie except that I wrote a couple of weedy songs," she said at the time.

But in 1984 the word "solo" has a much nicer sound to it. Christine, like Fleetwood Mac comrades Stevie Nicks, Lindsey Buckingham and Mick Fleetwood, has released her first album alone since the group joined forces in 1975. She recorded the album with ex-Average White Band drummer Steve Ferrone, guitarist Todd Sharp and bassist George Hawkins. Hawkins toured with Mick Fleetwood's Zoo and Sharp, a Bob Welch and Hall & Oates alumnus, co-wrote five songs with Christine and penned another two on his own.

Christine recorded most of the album in Montreux, Switzerland but came home to England to collaborate with an old friend, Steve Winwood. They sang together on "One In A Million" and co-wrote "Ask Anybody." Winwood also played synthesizer on four tracks. Another old chum, Eric Clapton, played guitar on "The Challenge."

When I spoke with Christine from Los Angeles, she was understandably excited. "Got A Hold On Me," the album's first single, was top ten and she was planning a two-month spring tour. Fans got a sneak preview of her band on an MTV concert broadcast from Los Angeles. Mick Fleetwood dropped in and there was always the chance that Mick, like some of her other friends from the Mac, might sneak into a couple of more gigs.

Steve Wosahla: Playing live with Fleetwood Mac, Mick gets to thrash at his drums, Stevie shakes her tambourine and Lindsey stalks the stage. But you are always curled behind the keyboards. How do you express your excitement? Are you able to convey it?

Christine McVie: Well, I think it's facial a lot but, unfortunately, a lot of people can't see my face because I'm facing the band rather than the audience. But I'm going on the road and I'm taking another keyboard player (Eddy Quintela) with me so that's going to enable me to move around or change the position of the piano and be able to get out from behind the keyboards on a few songs. I'm immensely looking forward to this. It's gonna be a new way to perform.

SW: Some of the songs on your record have a first time in love feeling whereas some of the Fleetwood Mac songs you've written tend to be more introspective and serious. Do you agree?

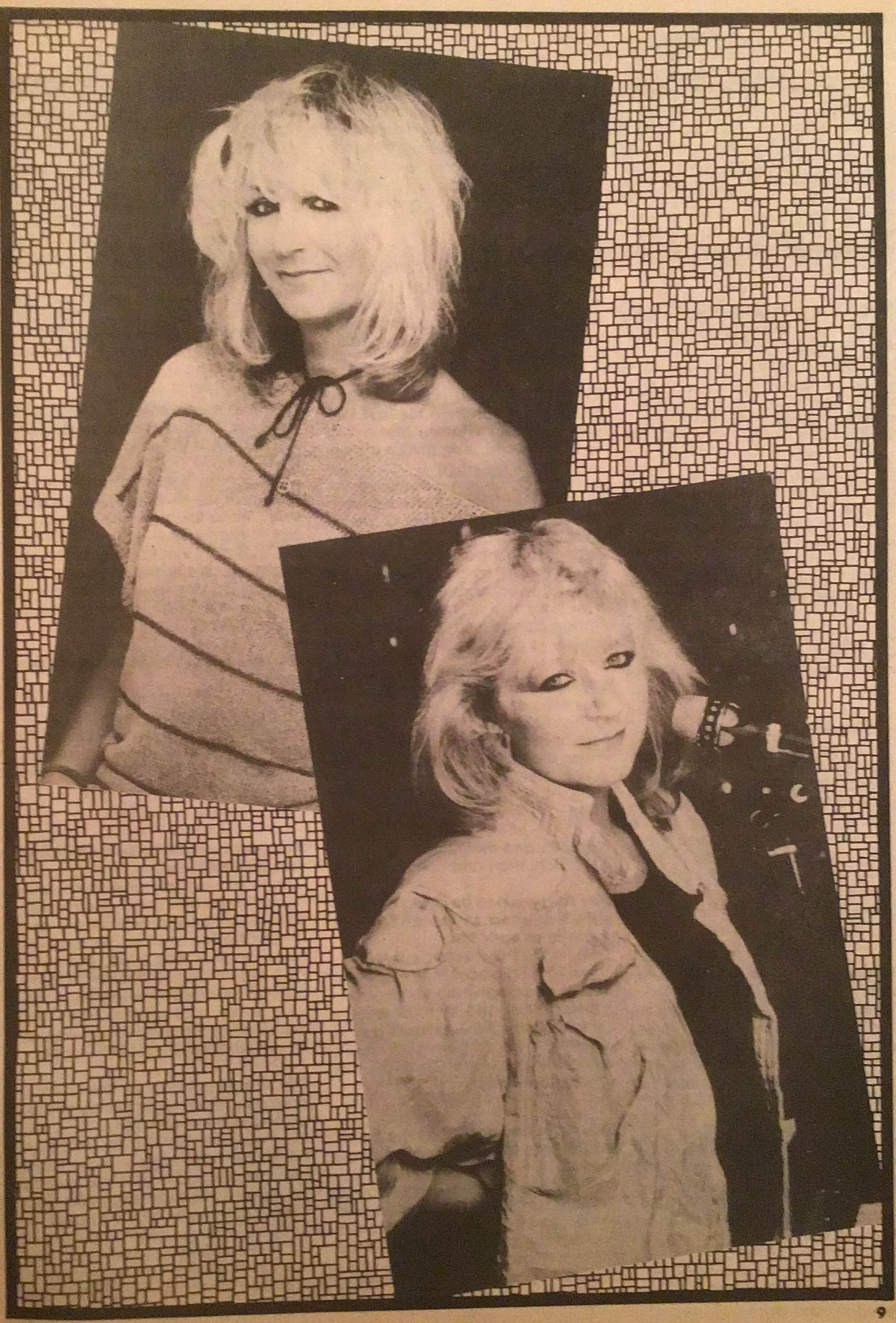
CM: At the time I wrote these songs I was. I am now. No, not really. It's just the way the songs came out. I just think I felt very happy working with Todd. It's the first time I've ever worked so closely with another writer. We made the demos before we went into the studio. We recorded all the songs on a little Teac four-track in my music room and we just had a tremendous good time doing that. I don't know whether it was my state of mind but I just felt very much forward to making the record, optimistic.

SW: Do you think that in your songs you are able to articulate the feelings people have about love and relationships?

CM: I suppose so. I don't know. I get a lot of people commenting about my love song themes. When I write a song it just seems like such a natural subject to sing about in a song. The subject of love and the different aspects of love seem to lend itself to my kind of melodies. The older songs, like "Songbird," people relate to things that happened to them when the record came out. It's hard to say with this one, it's early days.

SW: Are you pretty outspoken about your feelings in your songs? Do you think you say more in your songs than just when you're talking to people?

CM: I think I say a lot more when I talk to people. A lot of those songs aren't autobiographical. Someone said to me I'd have to be 104 if I went through all those experiences myself. A lot of them are just observations of other people's relationships where I step into the first person or is it the third person? I just step into their shoes and write from their point of view. I do that a lot. But I would say that about fifty percent of them are experiences personal to me.



SW: What do you consider your favorite songs that you've ever written?
CM: Favorite songs I've ever written ... I just got asked this question and I hate answering it. They change. I told this other guy "Over My Head" was one of my favorites and "Don't Stop," "Hold Me." Boy, there's a lot of them delving around. "Brown Eyes" is a good song. I don't want to list thousands. Let's say I look on them all kindly. There's only one or two I don't like and those kind of go back a long way.

SW: Speaking of going back a long way, tell us about your reunion with Steve Winwood.
CM: The last time I saw him was probably fifteen to twenty years ago. He was about fourteen years old. I was a very good friend of Spencer Davis'. I mean it wasn't a romantic relationship so much as a musical one. That's when I first met Steve, when Spencer first formed the Spencer Davis Group. I'd sort of followed Steve's career throughout the years and I really loved his solo work. When I decided to make this record, I called him up on the off chance and asked him if he wanted to write a song with me and he said he'd love to. I just went over to his house for a couple of weeks and recorded the song in his studio in his house.

SW: What's his house like?
CM: Oh, it's a huge old baronial hall, what they call a small holding in England. He's got thousands of acres of land and rolling hills. Apparently his dining room dates back to the doomsday book. It's really, really old, like 1066. Obviously there have been additions over the years but basically it's just a beautiful old manor house. He has sheep and cows and he's something of a farmer.

SW: Has he changed much from the boy of fourteen?
CM: Well, I didn't really ever know him that well when he was fourteen. But he's the most charming, sweet man. He's a pleasure to work with and he's got a tremendous sense of humor too. He's great.

SW: Going back to England, did it feel like you had been away a long time?
CM: Well, not really. I spent almost the last seven months in Montreux and going back and forth to London from there. I generally get to England about once a year. So I don't feel too strange from it.

SW: Do you ever feel like living there?
CM: Sometimes. But I must say I'm very happy here at the moment. If I was to live there again it wouldn't be on a full-time basis. I wouldn't mind getting a little cottage in the country or something like that and going there for a couple of months of the year. I miss certain aspects of London, of England, in general.

SW: Which ones?
CM: Well, the people. I'd forgotten how warm the people are in England and how friendly. Well, of course, there's obviously the pubs and the Indian restaurants which I certainly miss a lot over here.

SW: Basically your whole band played with Mick on his last tour with the exception of Steve and Todd. But Todd is on Mick's album.
CM: Yeah, Billy and George are actually on his last album, *I'm Not Me*. They both contributed quite a few songs. We've all kind of known each other for quite a long time and swap around bands. I play in his band when I can and Mick makes a guest appearance with me every now and then. There's one big hodge podge of musicians which we get to pick out of.

SW: Are you playing on Lindsey's new record?
CM: Not as of yet. At the moment it's just Lindsey and a Fairlight. But I mean it's early days. I'm gonna go over and invade his house one day. I think he wants me to sing something.

SW: Man and machine.
CM: Yeah, man and computer.

SW: You're gonna be doing a record with the band at the end of the summer or early fall.
CM: Yeah, this is what everyone's been talking about in the last few weeks, deciding when we're gonna get together and try to do something. It seems like August will be the earliest. It would be nice to finish something before Christmas or shortly afterwards.

SW: Mick has said that the band might tour after the record is released.
CM: Well it's hard to say right now. It depends on how everything goes in the studio. I don't know what Stevie's feelings are about touring with the band or Lindsey's if it comes to that. I know that Lindsey definitely wants to make another record but it's hard to know about touring yet. We'll have to take first things first.

SW: Do you still feel challenged by Fleetwood Mac? Do you still think there's a lot of new things you can do?
CM: Yeah, I think there's *lots* of new things we can do. One would be to collaborate writing more. I'd be interested to write a song for Lindsey or Stevie to sing or vice versa. There's all kinds of things we haven't explored yet. Lindsey's very much interested in the Fairlight and he's recording his album, the majority of it, on the Fairlight. My passions are real instruments. I think the combination of the two is gonna be real interesting.

SW: In a recent interview you said that making a Fleetwood Mac record would be difficult.
CM: We haven't seen each other for a long time. I saw John briefly in Montreux for a week and I haven't seen Stevie for at least two years. I don't recall saying it would be difficult but I would imagine there might be one or two problems but we just don't know yet. We don't know quite what to expect from each other.

SW: You haven't seen Stevie for two years?
CM: Something like that. She's been on the road. Eighteen months at any rate. I can't remember the last time I saw her. I think it was when she got married. She's been on the road and I've been doing one thing or another.

SW: Do you want to keep making solo albums?
CM: I enjoyed this one so much I hope it won't be the last one I make. But I won't be ready to make another one for another year, if we make another record with the Mac. I'd kind of like to make a blues album. I've been toying with the idea of that, not that it would be any tremendous commercial success but I'd certainly like to do it for myself.

SW: Having been in the music business for close to twenty years, do you still like touring?
CM: Well, I think it goes hand in hand with recording. When you've been in the studio for three months you want to go on the road and after you've been on the road for three months, you can't wait to get back in the studio. It's very lucky that it works that way. I think if I had to choose, I'd choose the studio. I like to record.